National Wildlife Areas and Migratory Bird Sanctuaries

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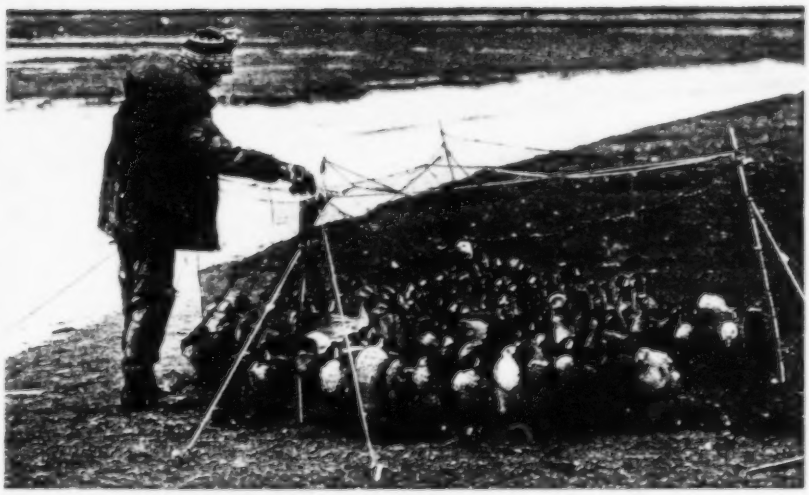

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This loon sign marks the boundaries of National Wildlife Areas and Migratory Bird Sanctuaries.
Photo: Jim Foley

Migratory Bird Sanctuaries on southern James Bay are one of the most important stopping places in Canada for shorebirds.
Photo: Guy Morrison

Polar Bear Pass National Wildlife Area on Bathurst Island protects important habitat for polar bears, muskoxen, and Peary caribou.
Photo: Guy Morrison

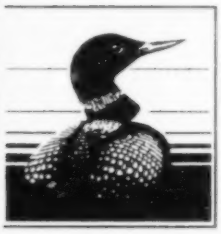
A CWS biologist prepares to band geese in Dewey Soper Migratory Bird Sanctuary on Baffin Island.
Photo: J.S. Wendt

Canada is renowned as a land of magnificant natural scenery and a wealth of wildlife. What many people may not know, however, is that some of the country's most important sites for wildlife and coincidentally, some of its most scenic, are protected spaces for wildlife.

The Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) manages a network of National Wildlife Areas and Migratory Bird Sanctuaries across Canada. Together these sites protect some 11 600 000 ha, an area more than twice the size of Nova Scotia. They contain a wide diversity of habitat of both national and even international importance. For example, 10 percent of the world's population of Semipalmated Sandpipers carpets the beaches and mudflats of Shepody and Chignecto National Wildlife Areas at migration time. Single flocks of 250 000 or more birds move as one body, wheeling in the sky, skimming over the water, and lighting on the shore in such density that the beaches seem alive with moving pebbles. The Great Plain of the Koukdjuak on Baffin Island (part of which is protected as Dewey Soper Migratory Bird Sanctuary) shelters the largest goose colony in the world. The leafy woodlands, marshes, and beaches of Long Point (part of which is a National Wildlife Area) contain over 90 species of boreal and Carolinean plants that are rare in Ontario, as well as several bird, reptile, and amphibian species at risk. More than 10 percent of the continent's population of Redheads (diving ducks) stops at Long Point during spring and fall migrations, and clouds of monarch butterflies alight there too during their southward migration. All together, whether they comprise towering cliffs, sand dunes, prairie potholes, tundra, salt marshes, or beaches and mudflats, National Wildlife Areas and Migratory Bird Sanctuaries are an integral part of Canada's protected spaces for wildlife.

Why are some areas set aside for wildlife?
Each wild plant and animal species needs habitat, that is, a particular location with specific characteristics, such as an appropriate climate and available food and shelter. Animals that migrate, for example, caribou and many birds, need several habitats. They may breed in one habitat during the summer, winter in another, and migrate along traditional routes during spring and fall.

To preserve abundant and diverse wildlife populations in Canada, we have to preserve suitable habitat. To this end, CWS identifies nationally important wildlife habitat, whose loss would have a direct impact on the Canadian population of one or more wild species. CWS works closely with other federal agencies, provincial and territorial governments, aboriginal peoples, private organizations, and individuals to ensure that nationally important areas are protected as National Wildlife Areas (NWAs) or Migratory Bird Sanctuaries (MBSs). As well, CWS promotes habitat-sensitive land-use practices everywhere in Canada.



Within the boundaries of National Wildlife Areas and Migratory Bird Sanctuaries, marked by this sign, regulations protect migratory birds and in National Wildlife Areas, other wildlife and habitat) from disturbance.

A bit of history
North America's oldest waterfowl refuge is at Last Mountain Lake in Saskatchewan. In 1887 Parliament set aside about 1000 ha at the north end of the lake to protect breeding grounds for "Wi[illegible] Fowl." In 1916 Canada and the United States signed the Migratory Birds Convention, a treaty that obliges both countries to preserve migratory birds and protect them from indiscriminate slaughter. After the passage of the *Migratory Birds Convention Act* in 1917 to implement the Convention in Canada, the federal government began establishing MBSs under the Act. Last Mountain Lake became an MBS; many other MBSs were created to protect migratory shorebird, waterfowl, and seabird populations on their staging and breeding grounds.

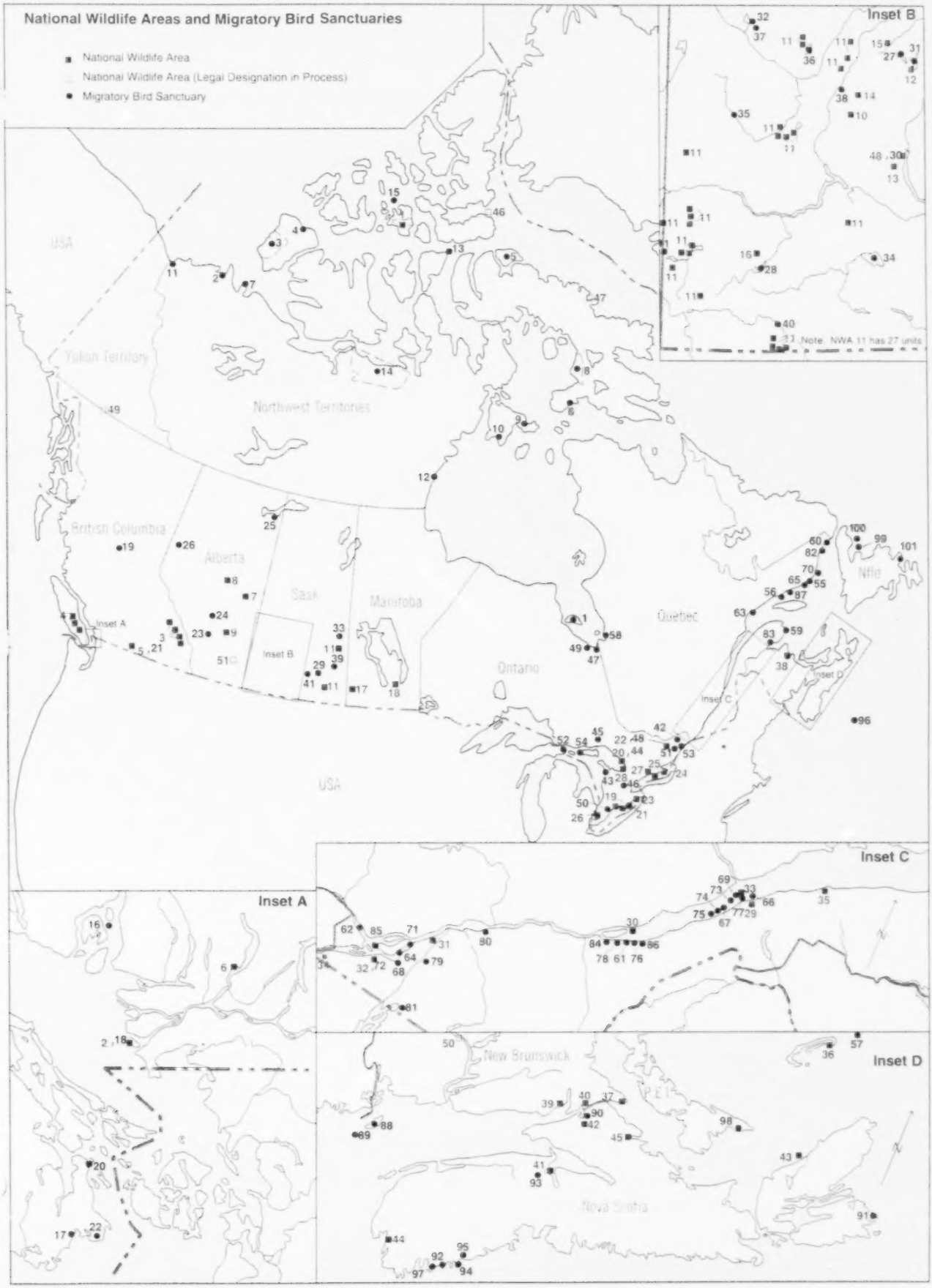
MBSs protect migratory birds against physical disturbance and hunting, which was the main threat in the early part of the century. By the 1960s and 1970s, the biggest threat to migratory birds — and to other wildlife species — was the loss and degradation of habitat. Critical wildlife habitats, particularly wetlands, were being lost at an alarming rate. The Migratory Bird Sanctuary Regulations could not be extended to protect habitat or species of wildlife other than migratory birds. In 1973 the *Canada Wildlife Act* was passed to authorize the establishment of refuges known as National Wildlife Areas in which migratory birds, other wildlife, and habitat could receive protection.

How is an NWA or MBS established?
Usually CWS staff nominate a potential NWA/MBS, although members of the scientific community, provincial biologists, conservation groups, aboriginal groups, and private citizens have all made proposals that have been adopted.

To be considered for an NWA or MBS, a site must contain "nationally significant" habitat for migratory birds, for example, regularly supporting at least one percent of a population of a migratory bird species or subspecies. With the agreement of the province or territory concerned, an NWA may also be created to protect other species under provincial or territorial jurisdiction.

CWS biologists map the area and make an inventory of the wildlife. CWS must either obtain the landowner's agreement to the designation or acquire title to the land. The site is then officially "scheduled" under either the Migratory Bird Sanctuary Regulations or the Wildlife Area Regulations. This is a legal process that includes publication in the Canada Gazette.

Since 1984 the large-scale purchase of habitat by CWS has not been possible, because Environment Canada has not had a specific budget for buying land. However, some important areas have been protected, thanks to donations and leases from the Nature Conservancy and other nongovernment partners, land transfers from other government agencies, or funds from other habitat protection programs, such as those of Wildlife Habitat Canada and the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. Recently the establishment of NWAs has been a part of land claim settlements reached with aboriginal groups.


National Wildlife Areas and Migratory Bird Sanctuaries
National Wildlife Area
National Wildlife Area (Legal Designation in Process)
Migratory Bird Sanctuary
Inset B
Note: NWA 11 has 27 units
USA
Yukon Territory
Northwest Territories
British Columbia
Alberta
Sask
Manitoba
Ontario
Quebec
Nfld
Inset A
Inset B
Inset C
Inset D
New Brunswick
PEI
Nova Scotia

ational Wildlife Areas and Migratory Bird Sanctuaries

National Wildlife Areas (45 legally established, 6 not yet scheduled)

).	Name and area (ha)
rthwest Territories	
	Polar Bear Pass (R)—262 400
itish Columbia	
	*Alaksen (R)—299
	Columbia—1001
	Qualicum—82
	*Vaseux-Bighorn—792
	Widgeon Valley—125
berta	
	Blue Quills—98
	Meanook—214
	Spiers Lake—64
skatchewan	
	Bradwell—123
	Prairie (27 units)—2949
	*Raven Island—94
	Stalwart—1460
	St. Denis—361
	Tway—96
	Webb—427
anitoba	
	Pope—31
	Rockwood—32
tario	
	Big Creek—773
	*Eleanor Island—0.6
	Long Point (R)—3250
	*Mississippi Lake—235
	Mohawk Island—2
	Prince Edward Point—246
	Scotch Bonnet Island—0.8
	St. Clair (R)—289
	Wellers Bay—40
	Wye Marsh—47
iebec	
	*Baie de L'Isle-Verte (R)—450
	Cap Tourmente (R)—2230
	Îles de Contrecoeur—222
	*Îles de la Paix—121
	*Îles de l'estuaire (8 islands)—72
	Lac Saint-François (R)—1347
	Pointe-au-Père—20
	Pointe de l'Est—684
w Brunswick	
	Cape Jourimain—589
	Portage Island—439
	Shepody (R)—979
	Tintamarre—1990
va Scotia	
	Boot Island—144
	*Chignecto (R)—1020
	Sea Wolf Island—54
	Sand Pond—515
	Wallace Bay—585
√As not yet scheduled :	
	Nirjutiqavvik, Northwest Territories—600
	Isabella Bay (Igalirtuuq), Northwest Territories
	*Last Mountain Lake, Saskatchewan (R)—15 602
	Nisutlin River Delta, Yukon—5275
	Portobello Creek, New Brunswick—2097
	Suffield, Alberta—42 000

Migratory Bird Sanctuaries (Total no. = 101)

No.	Name and area (ha)
Northwest Territories	
1	Akimiski Island—336 700
2	Anderson River Delta—108 300
3	Banks Island No. 1—2 051 800
4	Banks Island No. 2—14 200
5	Bylot Island—1 087 800
6	Cape Dorset—25 900
7	Cape Parry—300
8	Dewey Soper (R)—81 600
9	East Bay—11 660
10	Harry Gibbons—148 900
11	Kendall Island—60 600
12	McConnell River (R)—32 900
13	Prince Leopold Island—50 400
14	Queen Maud Gulf (R)—6 278 200
15	Seymour Island—800
MBSs 58 (Boatswain Bay) and 47 (Hannah Bay) are located partly in the NWT. They are listed under Quebec and Ontario respectively.	
British Columbia	
16	Christie Islet—0.08
17	Esquimalt Lagoon—130
18	*George C. Reifel (R)—648
19	Nechako River—180
20	Shoal Harbour—150
21	*Vaseux Lake—282
22	Victoria Harbour—1700
Alberta	
23	Inglewood—160
24	Red Deer—130
25	Richardson Lake—12 705
26	Saskatoon Lake—1135
Saskatchewan	
27	Basin and Middle Lakes—8720
28	Duncairn Reservoir—1546
29	Indian Head—32
30	*Last Mountain Lake (R)—4736
31	*Lenore Lake—8830
32	Murray Lake—1165
33	Neely Lake—809
34	Old Wives Lake—26 060
35	Opuntia Lake—1395
36	Redberry Lake—6395
37	Scent Grass Lake—633
38	Sutherland—130
39	Upper Rousay Lake—518
40	Val Marie Reservoir—505
41	Wascana Lake—104
Ontario	
42	Beckett Creek—103
43	Chantry Island—63
44	*Eleanor Island—0.6
45	Fielding—1295
46	Guelph—620
47	Hannah Bay (R)—29 785
48	*Mississippi Lake—430
49	Moose River (R)—1457
50	Pinafore Park—403
51	Rideau—800
52	St. Joseph's Island—940
53	Upper Canada—2663
54	Young Lake—534
Quebec	
55	Baie des Loups—4000
56	Betchouane—460
57	Bird Rocks—600
58	Boatswain Bay—17 900
59	Bonaventure Island and Percé Rock—1340
60	Brador Bay—500
61	Cap-Saint-Ignace—130
62	Carillon Island—500
63	Corossol Island—470
64	Couvée Islands—7
65	Île à la Brume—4450
66	Île aux Basques—1000
67	*Île aux Fraises—200
68	Île aux Hérons—600
69	Île Blanche—200
70	Île Sainte-Marie—4500
71	Île Saint-Ours—300
72	*Îles de la Paix—1100
73	*Îles du Pot à l'eau-de-vie—10
74	*Îles Pèlerins—4
75	*Kamouraska Islands—37
76	L'Islet—60
77	*L'Isle-Verte—300
78	Montmagny—160
79	Mont-Saint-Hilaire—950
80	Nicolet—2850
81	Philipsburg—550
82	Saint-Augustin—5530
83	Saint-Omer—60
84	Saint-Vallier—400
85	Senneville—300
86	Trois-Saumons—220
87	Watshishou—11 200
New Brunswick	
88	Grand Manan—250
89	Machias Seal Island—10
Nova Scotia	
90	*Amherst Point (R)—433
91	Big Glace Bay Lake—240
92	Haley Lake—100
93	Kentville—200
94	Port Hebert—350
95	Port Joli—280
96	Sable Island—2350
97	Sable River—260
Prince Edward Island	
98	Black Pond—130
Newfoundland	
99	Ile aux Canes / Green Island—150
100	Shepherd Island—16
101	Terra Nova—870

Ramsar site. This site is listed under the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance Especially as Waterfowl Habitat, which was drafted in the city of Ramsar in Iran and is also known as the Ramsar Convention. The only obligation that the convention places on the managers of wetlands included in the list is not to allow activities that would alter or destroy the ecological character of the wetland.

Contains or overlaps with an NWA or MBS.

Private citizens can give or bequeath land to the Crown for the purpose of habitat conservation.

Migratory Bird Sanctuaries

There are 101 MBSs in Canada, totalling approximately 11.3 million hectares (see map). The largest federally protected area in Canada is the Queen Maud Gulf MBS, which was created in 1961 on the northern mainland tundra of the Northwest Territories. Over 90 percent of the world's population of a small white goose, called Ross' Goose, nests there. The Queen Maud lowlands shelter the largest variety of geese of any nesting area in North America, including Ross' Geese, Lesser Snow Geese, Canada Geese, White-fronted Geese, Atlantic Brant, and Black Brant, as well as Tundra Swans.

There are several other very large MBSs in the Northwest Territories, but sizes of the other MBSs vary greatly. In British Columbia, the Vaseux Lake MBS, 282 ha of lake and shoreline in the Okanagan Valley, was established to protect endangered Trumpeter Swans that stop there during their autumn migration. The smallest MBS, the 0.6-ha Eleanor Island, is in Lake Muskoka, north of Toronto. This rocky island supports colonies of Great Blue Herons and Ring-billed and Herring gulls. Île Sainte-Marie MBS (4500 ha) on the north shore of the Gulf of St. Lawrence is an important nesting site for thousands of seabirds, among them Common Murres and Razorbills. Machias Seal Island MBS, near Grand Manan Island in the Bay of Fundy, is very small (10 ha), but is the most important nesting colony for Atlantic Puffins and Arctic Terns south of Newfoundland.

The Migratory Bird Sanctuary Regulations prohibit all disturbance, hunting, and collection of migratory birds and their eggs within an MBS. Visitors must not carry firearms or allow their pets to run at large. The regulations only control activities within sanctuary boundaries when migratory birds are actually present and do not provide protection of habitat.

There are MBSs in all provinces and territories except Manitoba and the Yukon. Management includes periodic inspections, enforcement of hunting prohibitions and regulations, and the maintenance of signs. Sometimes habitat is improved, and CWS staff carry out research at some sites. In the Northwest Territories, CWS prepares management plans for the MBSs.

National Wildlife Areas

The purpose of NWAs, as set out in the *Canada Wildlife Act*, is to conserve essential habitat for migratory birds and, if in the national interest and with the support of provinces, other wildlife species, especially endangered wildlife. In 1994 there were 45 NWAs protecting approximately 287 000 ha of habitat. Another 6 sites are designated to become NWAs (see map).

The Wildlife Area Regulations under the *Canada Wildlife Act* control activities in NWAs during all seasons, even when migratory birds are not present. There are NWAs in all provinces and territories, except Newfoundland and Prince Edward Island. (The one in the Yukon is not yet scheduled.)

NWAs protect a variety of critical habitat areas across Canada. The wetlands of the Alaksen NWA in the Fraser River estuary in British Columbia are an internationally important migration stopover and wintering area for huge numbers of migrating birds, such as Lesser Snow Geese, ducks, and shorebirds. Pointe de l'Est NWA is one of the few remaining nesting sites in Quebec for the Piping Plover, which is "endangered" in Canada. The shortgrass prairie and sand dunes of the new Suffield NWA are home to the Burrowing Owl and Ferruginous Hawk, both "threatened" species. The bowhead whales in Isabella Bay (site of a proposed marine NWA) are part of the "endangered" arctic population of bowheads.

CWS prepares a management plan for each NWA, after public consultation. The plans specify on a case-by-case basis which activities are to be allowed under permit. For example, oil drilling, livestock grazing, or haying could be allowed with strict limitations under a yearly permit. Management plans may also specify how and where to make habitat improvements (for example, by planting native plants to provide food and cover for birds and other wild animals, or digging ponds to make the landscape more attractive to waterfowl).

Conservation is not the only purpose of the NWAs. Under the *Canada Wildlife Act*, public education and research are also goals. In most NWAs, visitors are allowed to hike, canoe, take photos, and watch birds. Traditional uses may be allowed to continue: trapping of muskrats and hunting and fishing are part of some management plans. At Cap Tourmente NWA carefully controlled hunting takes place. All these activities are regulated to prevent declines in wildlife populations and deterioration of habitats.

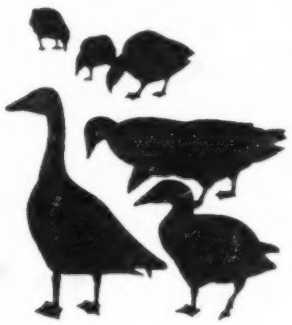
In some NWAs, research takes precedence. Access to Scotch Bonnet Island NWA in Lake Ontario is restricted, because the island is used for long-term studies of the effects that environmental contamination of the food web in the Great Lakes is having on wild birds. Archeological and biological research is carried out at Polar Bear Pass NWA in the Northwest Territories and other sites.

International recognition for some NWAs and MBSs

Many of the sites long protected as either an NWA or MBS have more recently also been accorded international recognition. The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance Especially as Waterfowl Habitat, or Ramsar Convention, identifies Wetlands of International Importance. Canada has 32 such sites. Cap Tourmente NWA was Canada's first; 17 NWAs and MBSs are now Ramsar sites or included in Ramsar sites. Designation as a Ramsar site supports existing federal or provincial legislation.

The Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network links together sites in different countries of North, Central, and South America that are essential to large numbers of shorebirds as they complete their yearly migrations of thousands of

Trails and observation platforms at Cap Tourmente NWA allow fall visitors to view the more than 100 000 Greater Snow Geese that feed there during migration.



kilometres. The Shepody NWA was named Canada's first such reserve in 1987.

Can the public visit NWAs and MBSs?
Most sites are open to the public. A few provide special facilities to view wildlife: Alaksen NWA in British Columbia, Cap Tourmente NWA in Quebec, St. Clair NWA in southwestern Ontario, Mary's Point Unit of Shepody NWA in New Brunswick, Chignecto NWA in Nova Scotia, Last Mountain Lake MBS in Saskatchewan, and others. There are exhibits, trails, brochures, and viewing stands to help visitors understand their surroundings.

Most NWAs and almost all MBSs, however, are unstaffed and do not have onsite visitor services. In some cases, CWS may prohibit visitors during critical periods, such as nesting and moulting. For example, during the breeding season, the public may not visit Mohawk Island NWA in eastern Lake Erie. In New Brunswick, the activities of the tour boat operators who ferry birdwatchers to Machias Seal Island MBS are restricted by regulations that limit the number of visitors allowed on the island each day. Other NWAs and MBSs are closed to the public seasonally or permanently for a number of reasons, including geographical inaccessibility and wildlife preservation.

To find out more about a particular NWA or MBS, write or call the nearest CWS regional office listed below. If you are interested in the nationwide system of national wildlife areas, direct your inquiry to the Ottawa address at the end of the folder.

Reading list

Canadian Environmental Advisory Council. 1991. A protected areas vision for Canada. Ottawa.

Gillespie, D.I., H. Boyd, and P. Logan. 1991. Wetlands for the world: Canada's Ramsar sites. Canadian Wildlife Service. Ottawa.

Wildlife Habitat Canada. 1991. The status of wildlife habitat in Canada: realities and visions. Ottawa.

For sites in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Newfoundland, and Prince Edward Island:
Canadian Wildlife Service
Environment Canada
P.O. Box 1590
Sackville, New Brunswick E0A 3C0
Tel.: (506) 364-5044

For sites in Quebec:
Canadian Wildlife Service
Environment Canada
1141, route de l'Église
C.P. 10 100
Sainte-Foy, Quebec G1V 4H5
Tel.: (418) 648-7225

For sites in Ontario:
Canadian Wildlife Service
Environment Canada
49 Camelot Drive
Nepean, Ontario K1A OH3
Tel.: (613) 952-2403

For sites in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and the Northwest Territories:
Canadian Wildlife Service
2nd floor, 4999 - 98 Ave.
Environment Canada
Edmonton, Alberta T6B 2X3
Tel.: (403) 468-8919

For sites in British Columbia and the Yukon:
Canadian Wildlife Service
Environment Canada
P.O. Box 340
Delta, British Columbia V4K 3Y3
Tel.: (604) 946-8546

The Canadian Wildlife Service
The Canadian Wildlife Service of Environment Canada handles wildlife matters that are the responsibility of the Canadian government. These include protection and management of migratory birds as well as nationally significant wildlife habitat. Other responsibilities are endangered species, control of international trade in endangered species, and research on wildlife issues of national importance. The service cooperates with the provinces, territories, Parks Canada, and other federal agencies in wildlife research and management.

For more information about the Canadian Wildlife Service or its other publications, please write to the following address:

Publications
Canadian Wildlife Service
Environment Canada
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0H3
Tel.: (819) 997-1095

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